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Sent: Friday, October 17, 2014 4:12 PM
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Subject: Sunoco spill in Louisiana raises concerns along Mariner East

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The Mariner East pipeline. (Photo from sunocologistics.com)

GALLERY: The Mariner East pipeline. (Photo from sunocologistics.com)

By Andrew Maykuth, Inquirer Staff Writer

Posted: October 16, 2014

A Louisiana oil spill is adding to anxiety for Pennsylvania residents who live near the Mariner East pipeline connecting the Marcellus Shale to Marcus Hook.

Sunoco Logistics Partners L.P. of Philadelphia on Tuesday supervised cleanup operations in Northwest Louisiana after its Mid-Valley pipeline on Monday leaked thousands of gallons of crude oil into a creek that feeds Lake Caddo, near Shreveport.

Monday's incident was the second major spill along the 65-year-old Mid-Valley pipeline this year. About 20,000 gallons leaked into a nature reserve near Cincinnati in March, where remediation efforts are still underway.

Activists fighting Sunoco's proposed Mariner East project in Pennsylvania, which involves repurposing an 83-year-old cross-state pipeline to deliver Marcellus Shale liquids to Delaware County, took note of the Louisiana spill.

"That's the kind of stuff that scares people who live along these aging pipelines," said Tom Casey, a director of the Chester County Community Coalition.

Jeffrey P. Shields, Sunoco's communications manager, said the volume and the cause of the Louisiana release were undetermined.

The company shut down the 20-inch diameter pipeline, a major supplier of Gulf Coast crude to Midwestern refineries. The line runs about 1,000 miles from Longview, Texas; to Samaria, Mich.; and has a capacity of 280,000 barrels per day.



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Jean Kelly, a spokeswoman for the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, said up to 4,000 barrels of oil spilled - 168,000 gallons, enough to fill about six rail-tank cars. Three households were evacuated, fish were killed, and the oil sheen came within 50 feet of Lake Caddo, she said.

More than 100 contract workers were containing and removing oil from the stream Wednesday, Kelly said. She said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Louisiana game officials were also on site.

Shields said that Sunoco's pipeline center detected a change in pressure and flow in the pipeline at 8 a.m. Monday and shut down the section of pipe. Sunoco employees walking the pipeline found the leak site less than four hours later, about four miles south of Mooringsport in Caddo Parish.

The loss of a key supply route depressed West Texas oil prices. Sunoco said the pipeline would be shut indefinitely, though based on past leaks, repairs can be done in a matter of days.

Sunoco Logistics partnership units recovered Wednesday on the New York Stock Exchange after plunging 7.5 percent Tuesday.

Shields said Sunoco routinely tests and maintains its pipelines.

"Age is not the main determinant in pipeline integrity," he said.

The Mariner East pipeline has undergone pressure testing before being repurposed to carry liquid fuels such as propane and ethane from Western Pennsylvania to Marcus Hook.

Sunoco has replaced about 28 of 246 miles on the Mariner East route over the years, Shields said. The project also includes about 50 miles of new pipeline in Western Pennsylvania.

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